Canadian Centre
For Foreign Policy
Development

Centre canadien
pour le développement
de la politique étrangère

1013,4 E

CHILDREN AND VIOLENT CONFLICT
MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF DIVERSITY

A Policy Paper Submitted to the CCFPD by

Erin Baines, Dalhousie University
Barry Burciul, University of Toronto

Summer 2000

125 promenade Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2
Telephone/Téléphone : **613 944 8278** Fax/Télécopieur : **613 944 0687**
www.cfp-pec.gc.ca

103-07618/

CHILDREN AND VIOLENT CONFLICT
MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF DIVERSITY

A Policy Paper Submitted to the CCFPD by

Erin Baines, Dalhousie University
Barry Burciul, University of Toronto

Summer 2000

Children and Violent Conflict: Meeting the Challenge of Diversity

Policy and Programme Options for Canada

Erin Baines
Dalhousie University

Barry Burciul
University of Toronto

July 2000

Please direct all comments and questions to:

ebaines@sprint.ca

and

b.burciul@utoronto.ca

PREFACE 1

1. INTRODUCTION 2

Structure of the paper 2
Focusing on children requires maintaining a broad perspective 3

2. UNDERSTANDING THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT 4

A) THE NEW INSECURITY ENVIRONMENT 4
B) THE GLOBAL POLICY ENVIRONMENT 5
C) THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT: CONCLUSIONS 7

3. CHILDREN AND CONFLICT: DIVERSE PEOPLE, DIVERSE EXPERIENCES 7

A) THE NEW HUMANITARIANISM: ASSISTANCE WITHOUT PROTECTION? 7
B) YOUNG CHILDREN 9
Physical health 9
Mental and emotional welfare 10
Education 10
C) ADOLESCENTS 12
Adolescents and psychosocial welfare 13
Meeting the psychosocial needs of adolescents: needs, gaps, and prescriptions 14
Gaps in knowledge 14
Moving forward: Strategies for meeting the needs of adolescents 15
D) GIRLS 16
Gaps in Knowledge 17
Questions to develop gender analysis 17
E) BOYS 18
Some gender-related questions relating to boys 18
F) CHILD SOLDIERS 19
Gaps in Knowledge and Strategies 20
G) REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS 21
Different assistance and protection needs arise in different situations of displacement: 21
Gaps between Policy and Practice 23
H) CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES 23
Gaps and Strategies 23

4. THE WAY AHEAD: POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS 24

A) GENERAL POLICY PRINCIPLES 24
B) BEFORE CONFLICT 25
i) Demilitarization 25
ii) Development and Local Empowerment 25
iii) Raising Awareness and Building Capacity 26
iv) Coordination and Institutional Change 26
C) DURING CONFLICT 27
i) Protecting and assisting children 27
ii) Responding to violations of children's rights 28
D) POST-CONFLICT 28
i) Return and Reintegration 28
ii) Reconstruction 29
iii) Rehabilitation 30
iv) Reconciliation 30

5. A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION 32

Preface

This research project was made possible through a grant from the John Holmes Fund, administered by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development. It was conducted by two 'youth' researchers, Barry Burciul (University of Toronto) and Erin Baines (Dalhousie University) over the course of winter, 2000.

The objectives of the project were to conduct a survey and study of the efforts of states, multi-lateral institutions, NGOs and civil youth organizations in conflict and post-conflict situations with a view to formulating policy proposals of interest to the Canadian government.

In this report, current theoretical and practical approaches to issues of children in armed conflict are situated within the current international policy and political environments. The report emphasizes the need to understand issues of children in armed conflict through the lens of diversity; i.e., to explore differences among children and adolescents which require unique responses. Where possible, it prompts the reader to consider critical questions relating issues of children in armed conflict, and to challenge common assumptions regarding this issue.

The report provides a series of policy recommendations based on different stages of a conflict cycle: before conflict, during conflict and post-conflict. The report concludes with a series of general policy recommendations which in principle should guide any policy or programme regarding children in armed conflict.

The methodology of the report consisted of interviews with actors inside U.N. agencies, transnational advocates, INGOs, Canadian NGOs and persons within CIDA and DFAIT. One of the authors also participated in the youth panel at the Canadian-NGO Peacebuilding Conference in February 2000. A broad survey of existing materials produced by various actors named above was reviewed, including policy statements and strategies of various government and international organizations, as well as NGOs; prior reports and conference papers, reviews and surveys of programmes were also examined.

1. Introduction

In many respects, the issue of 'children and violent conflict' defies easy analysis and policy prescriptions. The fact that we refer to persons under 18 years of age as 'children' and seek to address 'their' problems, can easily serve to obscure the diversity of this group as well as their potential to work towards solutions. The needs and capacities of children differ profoundly according to their age, gender, cultural context, level of education, socio-economic background, and their experiences prior to, during, and following violent conflict. Taking children seriously demands that we pay attention to these differences when assessing needs, evaluating ongoing efforts, and formulating policies and programmes. It also means actively promoting the involvement of children and adolescents, recognizing and supporting their capabilities and building their resources.

The complexity of the issue, and the vast number of ongoing initiatives, make a full-fledged survey impractical.[1] Instead, this paper will approach the issue of children and violent conflict through the lens of *diversity*. This approach allows us to focus on the shortcomings of current programmes, and to highlight the ways in which future policy initiatives can maximize their positive impact on the welfare and rights of *all* children.

Structure of the paper

This paper begins with a discussion of the policy environment surrounding the issue of children in conflict; that is, the set of historical circumstances and social forces which are affecting the frequency and nature of violent conflict, the role of children in conflict, and the approaches which states, international organizations and NGOs adopt (or fail to adopt) in their efforts to address the needs of children. By understanding this policy environment, we are better equipped to assess ongoing programmes and to offer policy proposals which are both productive and pragmatic.

The next section of the paper takes up the theme of protection, asking how we should view the task of protecting children from various physical and economic threats, and how the task of protection relates to that of 'assistance.' This discussion incorporates the motif of diversity by considering how conflict affects several diverse populations of children: pre-adolescents, adolescents, girls, boys, child soldiers and support personnel, refugees and internally displaced persons, and disabled children.

The third section provides a set of policy proposals and recommendations based on the preceding analysis. These proposals are organized in a temporal manner – i.e., they describe measures that can be taken prior to conflict, during conflict, and in the post-conflict phase. Significantly, the proposals are designed to take note of the diverse needs of children, the realities

---

[1] A number of excellent, in-depth reviews exist, and the present report should encourage readers to refer to them. See especially Graça Machel, Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. United Nations (A/51/306), 26 August 1996; Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children, Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict. New York: January 2000; and Protection on Children and Adolescents in Complex Emergencies Oslo/Hadeland 9-11 November 1998, Conference Report, found on Reliefweb, April 2000 at http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/protchildren.htm

of the policy environment, the lessons of prior experience, and the specific capacities which Canada can bring to bear in its efforts to enhance the security of children under threat.

The final section of the paper provides readers with a 'construction kit for social change' – a table depicting the needs of conflict-affected children, the basic strategies which can be employed to fulfill those needs, and many of the social actors and groups which are salient to the issue. This exercise is intended to foster creative thinking among child advocates with regard to strategies for achieving the goals outlined in this paper.

Focusing on children requires maintaining a broad perspective

While this paper highlights the diversity of children and their *specific* experiences in conflict, this must not distract us from some key facts which are apparent when one adopts a broader perspective. First, children are human beings. As such, they share with adults a set of typically human basic needs: i.e., physical protection, food, shelter, medical care, etc. **In conflict, it is these basic needs that are most important. Even so, they often go unmet because of a lack of funding and political will.** When this is the case, it may be somewhat disingenuous to craft plans aimed at satisfying less immediately urgent needs, e.g., educating and counseling children during the active phase of a conflict.[2]

And yet, we must avoid the tendency to draw an artificial distinction between "needs" and "rights." **Speaking and acting as if emergency "needs" are one thing and "rights" are another, is misleading and counterproductive.** If they are to live human lives, children *need* to have all of their rights met. Emergency relief is not somehow "more necessary" than other needs such as development, education, employment, and mental health. These things occupy the same level in the hierarchy of needs. Moreover, **a 'band-aid' approach to humanitarianism – one which treats certain rights as optional, or less necessary – is doomed to result in inefficient and ineffective programming.**

The second 'broad perspective' point is that the welfare of children is intimately bound up with the welfare of adults, and of society as a whole. **Any attempt to address the needs and rights of children outside of this broader context – any programme which acts as if children can be provided for *solely* through programming aimed directly at them – will be inefficient at best, and futile at worst.** In addition to concentrating on how to help children *directly*, we must explore ways of providing integrated *general* programming which will create a 'child-friendly society', and foster conditions in which 'child-specific' programming can be more efficiently and effectively implemented.

Thirdly, if they are not carefully balanced and integrated with broader development and conflict prevention efforts, attempts to devote special attention to children in active conflict situations may lead to inefficiencies, ineffective programmes, and inequitable resource distribution. **The best way to protect children is to prevent conflict from erupting in the first place, and to strengthen the social and economic infrastructures of weak and war-prone societies.** Strong children and strong societies are better able to survive the rigors of conflict, and better able to recover when open hostilities have ceased.

---

[2] Of course, this raises ethical dilemmas when we consider the fact that there are usually several complex emergencies in progress at any given time. To what extent is it 'ethical' to provide services such as education and training in one area, while children in another emergency are not having their basic needs met? This is a difficult question, and it deserves respectful attention.

Finally, it is imperative that our efforts to protect children in conflict should not detract attention from the task of protecting other vulnerable children. There is nothing intrinsic about armed conflict that grants its victims a special moral status, or lends a greater degree of nobility to our efforts to help them. **The victims of everyday poverty, disease, and social dysfunction are equally deserving of our attention – particularly because these conditions so often contribute to future armed conflicts.** In sum: meeting the needs and rights of children in active conflict zones is a laudable goal, but it must not be allowed to overshadow the importance of long-term development and conflict prevention efforts, as costly and unglamorous as such efforts might be. The image of 'children in conflict' should be used as a means of mobilizing the world to address the needs and rights of children *everywhere*. We must not use our efforts to protect children in conflict as a way of assuaging our guilt at failing to protect children in other difficult circumstances, or as a way of masking our failure to prevent conflicts from erupting in the first place.

2. Understanding The Policy Environment

a) The New Insecurity Environment

It is widely acknowledged that **the nature of large-scale violent conflict has changed in the post-Cold War period.** Intra-state conflict has supplanted inter-state war as the primary focus of policy debates concerning 'global security.' While deadly civil war is not a new phenomenon, the most brutal forms of intra-state conflict do appear to be increasing in frequency. In many cases, civilians, rather than armed forces, have become the primary targets of organized violence: increasingly, ordinary people are viewed as strategic assets, to be exploited or eliminated as one side or another finds it expedient to do so. In addition, these wars are often characterized by ethnic hatred and genocide. These changes have had the greatest impact on the most vulnerable members of society, many of whom are children. Even when they are not exploited directly or specifically targeted for elimination, children tend to suffer disproportionately from the social, psychological and physical impacts of war.

However, in what we might call "the new insecurity environment," children *are* often exploited directly. Increasingly, children have been used by armies and paramilitary groups, both as soldiers and support personnel (porters, cooks, messengers, spies, decoys, prostitutes, captive sexual and domestic workers, physical laborers). This problem has been exacerbated by a range of factors, some of which are familiar, and some of which are new.

First, the civil wars of the past decade have maimed and injured so many adult soldiers and support personnel (both military and civilian) that armies, paramilitaries and societies have begun to use children to perform these tasks. **Second**, the increased flow of light weapons to conflict regions has made it possible for even very young children to play combat roles. **Third**, children are prized for the ease with which they can be manipulated or coerced into joining a cause, obeying orders, and performing difficult and dangerous tasks. **Furthermore**, the fact that they are children sometimes makes it easier for them to carry out support tasks – such as spying and scouting – without being suspected of doing so. (Of course, once one child is found performing such tasks, all children come under suspicion and are at greater risk of harm.)

Finally, the breakdown of the socio-economic order in conflict zones has created conditions in which children may quite rationally see it as beneficial (from a security, welfare, and/or psychological perspective) to join up with a 'side' in a civil conflict, whether as a soldier or in a supporting role. Indeed, extreme poverty, a lack of educational and employment opportunities, and a general breakdown of social support systems may leave children with little recourse to becoming partisans in a conflict. It should be remembered that different children become vulnerable to different forms of exploitation or violence. The issue of diversity is addressed more closely in Section III of this report.

b) The Global Policy Environment

How has the world responded to the new insecurity environment which has placed so many children in peril? The institutional response has been ambivalent. On one hand, there is a growing sense among Western states that human security should sometimes 'trump' state security – that is, state sovereignty should not impair attempts to provide humanitarian assistance in the face of large-scale suffering. The growing importance attached to human security has also been reflected in the strengthening of norms and legal instruments aimed at protecting civilians in general, and children in particular.

However, **these strides have usually not been matched by actions on the ground.** Recent 'humanitarian' interventions in civil conflicts have tended to be motivated primarily by political expediency and strategic concerns, rather than purely humane considerations. As a result, most civil conflicts do not become the focus of concerted, armed, state-sponsored efforts to protect civilians. **Despite recent developments in the legal sphere, involved states and warring factions are often reluctant to observe international norms regarding child rights. Furthermore, the perpetrators of violence against children go unapprehended and unpunished in the vast majority of cases.**

While they have typically been unwilling to intervene to put a stop to abuses of human rights, **states have increasingly employed various "arms' length" tools of foreign policy in an attempt to deal with humanitarian crises.** These have included sanctions, NGOs, and UN agencies. Yet these efforts have not yielded impressive dividends in terms of safeguarding the rights and welfare of children under threat.

The increased use of **comprehensive economic sanctions** in the early 1990s (most notably against Iraq) resulted in a backlash from those who decried the effects of such sanctions on civilians, and on children in particular. As a result, states have begun to institute 'humanitarian exemptions' to economic sanctions, and they have increasingly used targeted economic sanctions and other measures which are somewhat less apt to lead to deprivation among civilians. However, the regimes of target states have become adept at ensuring that civilians, and not elites, shoulder the burden of sanctions. Despite the efforts of states such as Canada to strengthen these measures while easing the burden they place on civilians, economic sanctions remain a largely ineffective policy instrument, and they frequently pose a threat to the welfare of children in target states. These drawbacks notwithstanding, they are frequently employed in a symbolic manner by

states who wish to give the appearance of 'doing something' in response to unpalatable behaviour by a target state.[3]

Economic forces, too, have played an important role in shaping the world's response to recent civil crises. First, states have cut their foreign aid and development budgets, and have come to favour massive "relief" and "emergency" initiatives to respond to full-blown, heavily-publicized crisis situations, rather than more efficient programming which would prevent conflict and improve the capacity of those in potential crisis areas to deal with disruptions in social services.[4] States have also found it convenient to effectively endorse a 'needs-based' approach when responding to conflict-related suffering, rather than a 'rights-based' approach, which would acknowledge that all people, everywhere, have the right to demand certain goods from their governments and, failing that, from the international community. While assistance activities based on addressing needs are obviously valuable, they tend to obscure the fact that vast segments of humanity are not having their basic rights met.

Second, in what one report describes as the **'changing political economy of international assistance,'** "[NGO] humanitarian actions are increasingly being used to fill (partially and unsuccessfully) a policy vacuum left by inaction on the part of responsible states... in complex emergencies in particular, NGOs are increasingly a principal conduit of assistance."[5] Given their experience in the past, NGOs are a logical partner to act in emergencies. Indeed, NGOs are today on the 'front lines' of child protection. However, filtering assistance through NGOs should not supplant state obligations and normative commitments to upholding and protecting child rights in the first place.

Finally, **states have made ever more conflicting demands upon the United Nations and its agencies**: even while decreasing its funding and insisting that it down-size its staff and rationalize its operations, states have demanded that the UN perform a wider range of protection and assistance tasks in conflict and post-conflict situations. Thus, UN agencies and NGO partners often find themselves in situations characterized by limited resources, donor-driven directives, expanded mandates, and radically new working environments. All of these pose significant challenges to developing long term, lasting solutions for meeting the needs and promoting he rights of children in conflict and post-conflict situations.

These phenomena – the retrenchment of the state, increased reliance on NGOs, and conflicting demands upon the UN – have created what might generously be termed 'difficult times' for those who take seriously the task of protecting children. One of the most disturbing side-effects of this policy environment has been **a lack of rational, logical, coordinated programming**. This reached absurd levels in the "humanitarian circus" that accompanied the Kosovo refugee crisis.[6] In this case, UNHCR lacked the capacity to coordinate the relief effort, NGOs were usually unwilling to coordinate with UNHCR or among themselves, and states – despite having sponsored NGOs and in many cases micro-managed their programmes – were

---

[3] For a discussion of these aspects of sanctions, see Barry Burciul, United Nations Sanctions: Policy Options for Canada. Ottawa: DFAIT, 1998.

[4] See Kenneth Bush, "Beyond Bungee Cord Humanitarianism: Towards a Developmental Agenda for Peacebuilding" Canadian Journal of Development Studies, Special Issue, 1996.

[5] For a good overview of the policy factors impacting on responses to humanitarian emergencies in the post-Cold War era, see Michael Bryans, Bruce D. Jones and Janice Gross Stein, Mean Times: Humanitarian Action in Complex Political Emergencies, Toronto: Centre for International Studies, January 1999, p.5.

[6] See Barry Burciul, Responding to Humanitarian Emergencies: The Lessons of Kosovo. Ottawa: DFAIT, 2000.

unwilling to compel these NGOs to coordinate. Nor did states provide UNHCR with the political and material support it required to effectively oversee the relief effort. This resulted in gaps in services, duplication of services, and problems with inappropriate and low-quality care for refugees.

c) The Policy Environment: Conclusions

This remainder of this report will identify a broad range of factors which need to be addressed if children threatened by armed conflict are to be adequately protected. However, it is the nature of such reports that they concentrate on problems with existing programmes, and on identifying groups and needs that have received inadequate attention. While these are important contributions, they must not be allowed to overshadow **the primary factors standing in the way of effective, child-centered foreign policies: a lack of political will – particularly to address the root causes of emergencies – and a lack of sufficient funding.** Even if all of the other policy recommendations in this report are implemented, children will continue to be woefully under-served unless states undertake concerted efforts to:

- protect children by all available means, including the use of force, where appropriate;
- curtail the flow of arms, large and small, to conflict-prone regions;
- identify, censure, apprehend, and punish parties who exploit children in conflict;
- significantly increase funding for development, conflict-prevention, and emergency relief programmes aimed at safeguarding children both directly and indirectly;
- renounce open-ended economic sanctions that can reasonably be expected to cause significant harm to children; and
- mainstream a child-rights perspective throughout foreign policy agendas (human security, defense, trade, development, finance), promoting consistency in approach so that one area does not undermine the efforts of the broader child rights perspective.[7]

To ignore these fundamental challenges – politically difficult and costly though they may be – is to break faith with children in need, and to miss the point of all of the other recommendations contained in this paper. To its credit, Canada has taken a leadership role on issues of human security, and on integrating the needs of children into its foreign policies. However, Canada alone cannot change the policy environment described above. If children are to be adequately protected, many states will need to exhibit courage, leadership, and a willingness to sacrifice.

3. Children and Conflict: diverse people, diverse experiences

a) The new humanitarianism: Assistance without protection?

Protection lies at the heart of the obligations which states – and indeed, the international community – have toward children in armed conflict. In order to provide

[7] The importance of mainstreaming a child rights perspective is elaborated in Section Three of this report.

protection, preventative as well as solutions-oriented strategies must be developed and backed by political will and material resources. These strategies must be grounded in a firm understanding of the diversity of the children which they seek to protect. The following section identifies the challenges facing state, non-state and multi-lateral organizations in the area of protection, highlighting key issues for consideration among diverse groups of children: young children and adolescents; girls and boys; child soldiers; and refugee, returnee and internally displaced children. This section emphasizes the vital linkages between assistance and protection activities, and demonstrates that childrens' rights and their basic needs are intertwined and inseparable.

In addition to challenging traditional approaches to protection which view children as a homogenous group, this section asks the reader to rethink certain underlying assumptions often implied in current protection/assistance strategies. **Today, an apparent contradiction exists between the promise of protection and the reality of children in armed conflict.** On the one hand, there is an increased willingness at the international and national level to question practices which violate rights, and to speak out against such violations. Over the past decade alone, a series of international conventions, protocols and resolutions, as well as the dedication of resources and good offices, have evolved or been created to meet the challenge of protection. On the other hand, intra-state and informal wars are increasing, and becoming more brutal for children: rules and conventions 'on the ground' are being unabashedly disobeyed.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of 'humanitarianism' in the past decade has been the degree to which it has concentrated on providing assistance to civilians during relatively safe periods and in relatively safe areas, while doing very little to actively protect them when they are in immediate danger from violent conflict. This raises some important general questions and points of awareness:

- **It is important to guard against the assumption that children are inevitably going to be shot, bombed, burned, maimed, tortured, raped, starved, abducted, conscripted, deprived of medical attention, and abused in other ways during conflict.** We need to ask precisely why we think this way, and what we could be doing – but choose not to do – in order to prevent these things from happening. For political and historical reasons, ideas such as "safe havens" and "humanitarian corridors" have come into disrepute. We should take a fresh look at why such ideas have failed in the past, and how they might be re-deployed in ways that serve to protect at least some children from the worst atrocities of war.

- **It is important for outside parties to ask how their approaches to the conflict might impact the welfare of children on the ground.** We need to ask how our actions and inactions facilitate, encourage, aid, abet, and allow children to be harmed. Air bombing campaigns, economic sanctions, arms sales, and the refugee policies of those who are euphemistically termed 'not parties to the conflict' – all of these things have an impact on the physical and mental welfare of children. We need to openly and honestly question how our actions might be harming children, and we need to be prepared to exert meaningful pressure on other parties – friends and enemies alike – when their actions are doing likewise.

- **It is important to question why we typically view only *armed* conflict as 'violent' conflict, when the effects of economic warfare (e.g. broad-based economic sanctions) on children can be just as horrific.** We should question how and why we actively explore ways to fine-tune health care activities for children in one conflict zone (e.g. Kosovo), while simultaneously depriving them of the necessities of life in another (e.g. Iraq). This sort of questioning requires tremendous political courage and moral honesty, but it is necessary if we are to do more than pay lip-service to the idea of respecting children's rights.

- **It is important to challenge the assumption that children are defined solely by their perceived vulnerability or helplessness.** Children and adolescents very often have keen insights into the events going on around them, and the vitality to work to eliminate them. It is further important to come to an understanding of why children are perceived in this way, and what purpose it serves. This may in fact be part of a global historical legacy which denies children the status of 'people' who hold the same basic rights as adults. Without such status, children and youth are completely excluded from decisions which affect them, and their ability to "choose" is under-estimated. As one author put it, "children do not have direct access to United Nations forums and decision-making consuls, to direct representation in courts of law, to state's policy-forming committees, or to NGO grants. Children are bound to laws in which they have no input, and by legal practice which they do not influence."[8] This point resonates too with the fact that humanitarian responses focus on basic needs, rather than the relationship between needs and rights of children, including the right to participate.

b) Young children

Pre-adolescent children are the most 'high profile' among child victims of war. Much of the child-specific programming that exists is either explicitly directed towards young children, or tacitly developed with the needs of such children in mind. Nonetheless, there are numerous gaps in programming, and much room for improvement. Toward this end, some relevant questions and suggestions are presented below.

Physical health

Obviously, **young children are particularly susceptible** to a variety of threats which emanate from conflict situations: malnutrition, communicable diseases, landmines, snipers, exposure to the elements, and extreme physical and mental exertion. These problems are often compounded by interruptions in health services, poor availability of materials, low quality of care, and general poverty. Despite a **chronic lack of financial and material resources and qualified personnel**, programmes directed at the physical health of children represent the most

[8] Carolyn Nordstrom, "Girls and War Zones," in D. Indra (ed). Engendering Forced Migration. New York: Bergahn Books. 1999, pp.63-82.

highly developed type of assistance activity in armed conflict situations. Still, it is important to explore ways of improving the health of children in conflict and post-conflict areas.

One particularly relevant question is: **how does the physical health and well-being of children intersect with that of adults?** One tendency among donors is to try to address the health needs of children in isolation. It seems clear that it is both more efficient and more effective to adopt a holistic approach, which views children as organic parts of a community. This means looking after the reproductive health needs of women, implementing aggressive pre-natal care programmes, preventing outbreaks of air- and water-borne diseases, and taking seriously the task of preventing HIV transmission both between sex partners, and *in vitro* between mother and fetus. While these problems are not limited to conflict zones, they tend to be exacerbated in such situations, and should therefore be viewed as health priorities when considering the needs of children in conflict.

Mental and emotional welfare

What types of counselling are best suited to preparing children for conflict-related suffering and helping them to cope with it and recover from it? The answer to this question is by no means clear – indeed, many experts suggest that there is no 'one best way.' Meeting the psychological needs of children requires sensitivity to their cultural context and their specific experiences, and a realistic assessment of available resources. What strategies will make children most comfortable? Are there enough counsellors to carry out an effective 'one on one' regime of psychotherapy? Are there indigenous mental health strategies which might prove more productive than the 'western model' of trauma therapy? Do aid organizations and governments have the resources and the will to sustain mental health programmes over the long term? What community- and family-based resources might be used, and how might they be used efficiently? Existing 'best practices' must be interpreted in light of a flexible approach which pays attention to such questions.

We must also remember that **providing for the mental and emotional well-being of children does not simply mean helping them to recover from their traumatic experiences.** Again, health must be viewed holistically. Whether physical or mental, health involves both the treatment and *prevention* of injuries and illnesses. Some of the most effective, high-yield ways of providing for the mental health of children are: to prevent conflict, to protect children and their families from physical, emotional and economic threats, to shield children from trauma, and to preserve normal routines (e.g. family, school, play) for as long as possible and to re-establish them as quickly and fully as possible where they have been interrupted.

Education

Education is not merely a prerequisite to the healthy development of children, it is also an efficient and effective 'vector' for meeting the special emotional and developmental needs of children affected by violent conflict. Education can play an important role during conflict by providing children – particularly young ones – with a sense of routine and normalcy. It can also help to prevent children from being recruited as soldiers and support personnel, or being exploited in other ways. By sustaining education during conflict, societies can minimize

the 'recovery time' following the cessation of hostilities, and help to build the strong human infrastructure that is necessary for social recovery.

However, **during the active phase of an emergency, education is often one of the first casualties.** According to one study, "Education usually receives little priority in situations of armed conflict. Only in wealthier countries is education likely to be sustained during fighting. What little aid there is for emergency education is usually directed at refugee populations rather than children remaining in war zones. Yet, coverage is only about 30 per cent even among refugee children."[9]

One of the main problems afflicting emergency education is that **much of the relevant funding is short-term in nature**, and subject to interruptions. In addition to prioritizing education as a goal, **children's advocates should explore ways of making emergency education funding more reliable and sustainable.**

There are numerous ongoing programmes which seek to provide education to children in conflict situations. One of the most effective programmes is the joint UNICEF-UNESCO initiative to create "Teacher Emergency Packages" of essential teaching materials. But despite the proliferation of programmes, there are many **basic questions which are not receiving due attention**, particularly when programmes are initially being designed and implemented in a given emergency setting:

- What are the relative merits and drawbacks of **formal and informal modes of education** in conflict and post-conflict settings? Relevant variables include: quality assurance, cost, accessibility, security of pupils and teachers, sustainability during hostilities, ability to meet multiple needs of children, and appropriateness to the cultural context.

- How can education best be **integrated with other goals**, such as development, peacebuilding, public health programmes, mine awareness campaigns, vocational training, protection initiatives, child soldier reintegration programmes, and psychotherapy?

- Is it ethical to encourage classroom education when schools are likely to be viewed as possible **targets of military aggression, or recruiting grounds** for child soldiers? What is the best solution, given the security situation in a particular locale?

- **How can education be made attractive** in settings where status and economic gain are often tied to membership in a military or paramilitary organization?

- **How can we ensure that education and its related benefits reach those who are most vulnerable**: geographically isolated children, those in active conflict zones, and those who are compelled to work in order to survive?

- During and after conflict, educators are often asked to teach a very diverse group of students: the same classroom often holds children of very different ages and war-time experiences. **How should educators deal with this heterogeneity?**

---

[9] Jo Boyden with Paul Ryder, Implementing the right to education in areas of armed conflict. Oxford: June 1996.

In addition, there are several higher-order questions concerning education which must be constantly re-evaluated by UN agencies, donors, and NGOs. These include:

- What aspects of past emergency education programming can and should be **replicated** in other contexts? What variables would require us to re-think or adapt existing models?
- What can be done to ensure **basic coordination and quality control**, given that educational programmes are initiated by vastly different types of actors (local communities, UN agencies, NGOs)?
- How can **traditional values and cultural knowledge** be imparted to the next generation under circumstances in which these types of knowledge are threatened, and where the content of curricula may be heavily politicized?

c) Adolescents

It is easy to view 'defenseless young children' more sympathetically than adolescents, who may look and act more like adults than they do children. Perhaps for this reason, **the special needs of adolescents tend to go unacknowledged and under-served**. This is unfortunate, because adolescents are a 'high-stakes' group: they are at great risk, and **their welfare carries great consequence for the welfare of society as a whole**. When the next generation of adults is being systematically destroyed, a society cannot hope to flourish.

At the same time, programming directed at adolescents carries a potentially substantial 'return on investment': adolescents are often willing and able to take part in actively constructing a healthy society, and given their importance in this regard, it is vitally important that programmes be developed which give them the chance to do so.

> Among children, adolescents are the most likely to experience: recruitment into military service; becoming heads of households; sexual violence and exploitation; sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS; the need to generate a livelihood for themselves and their families; and economic exploitation, in the worst cases as soldiers and prostitutes. Facing lack of opportunities and without hope, they may turn to drugs and crime. At the same time, they are the least likely to have access to education and health services, including reproductive health services.[10]

In terms of their relative ability to withstand the physical rigours of war and deprivation, adolescents are generally better off than younger children. However, as they enter adolescence, children face a **new range of threats and vulnerabilities**. Many of the new physical threats

[10] Non-governmental Organization (NGO) Submission to the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 29 February – 2 March 2000.

associated with adolescence are gender-specific, and they will be dealt with below in the sections on 'girls' and 'boys'. The present section will deal primarily with the ways in which conflict impacts on the *psychosocial welfare* of adolescents.

Adolescents and psychosocial welfare

The term "psychosocial welfare" embodies the important **linkages that exist between a child's social environment, and his/her mental health and personal development**. When considering this issue, the temptation is to simply view children as potential psychosocial casualties of a dysfunctional environment. And yet, the causal arrow points both ways. Psychosocial health encompasses the health of the society as well; and just as children cannot develop properly in the absence of healthy social structures, it is also difficult to build a healthy society unless the psychosocial needs of children are met. Appropriate programming must capitalize on this potential synergy, rather than viewing children as passive victims.

The psychosocial welfare of children can be affected by such conflict-related phenomena as: physical insecurity, threats to life, death or loss of family members and friends, disruptions in the family structure and routine, confinement, hiding or flight, dehumanization, torture, and the teaching of socially dysfunctional behaviour and ideas (e.g. killing, torture, rape, war-dependent ideologies.) These phenomena are very often exacerbated by the disruption of traditional learning structures and patterns of existence.

While these generally occurring phenomena are revealing, attention to the diversity of children is an especially crucial analytical tool when considering issues of psychosocial welfare. A child's age, gender, culture, dis/ability, role played in the conflict, type of non/displacement, and type of suffering experienced, can all have a significant impact on how the child will mentally 'process' his or her experience, and how able s/he will be to deal with it.

Adolescents are generally more conscious of their surroundings than younger children are, and the experiences of conflict are therefore likely to have more psychosocial 'meaning' for them. This is due largely to the nature of adolescence, which is captured nicely in the words of one expert: "Show me an adolescent, and I'll show you someone searching for their place in the world."[11] Conflict can affect this search for identity in several ways.

Often, conflict and its associated phenomena (flight, rape, forced labour) lead to a **sense of powerlessness** in adolescents, who may search in vain for ways of influencing their surroundings and their futures. At the other end of the same spectrum, adolescent child soldiers can assume positions of considerable power – including the power to take lives – and this may lead to an equally dysfunctional sense of self.

Insofar as conflict disrupts social structures – including families, schools, friendships, civil societal groups, and employment structures – it can interfere with the ability of an adolescent to form a healthy and stable sense of what the world is, and how s/he fits into it. In the short term, this is likely to lead to confusion and a sense of powerlessness, which can express itself in a number of ways. Often, these expressions are not constructive – they can involve apathy, inactivity, and violence. However, many adolescents have been able to respond to their environment in creative and constructive ways, whether by taking on greater responsibility individually, or by organizing themselves in groups to solve specific problems.

---

[11] Martha S. Bragin, quoted in WCRWC, Untapped Potential.

In the longer term, particularly where conflicts have lasted for years and decimated the adult population, psychosocial disruption may cause adolescents to be **unable to replicate healthy social structures at all levels**: from personal relationships up to national governments. This can affect almost every aspect of life: the way a person conceives of work and success, the proper means of solving personal problems, how to relate to spouses and children, the appropriate use of violence, how to run a household, etc.

Even as conflict interferes with the ability of adolescents to find their place in the world, it often places **unnaturally heavy burdens** on them. Because of conflict-related social breakdown, adolescents are more likely to find themselves as heads of households, wage-earners, soldiers, mothers and fathers, and labourers. Adolescents need more help than they are currently receiving in order to fulfill these roles.

Meeting the psychosocial needs of adolescents: needs, gaps, and prescriptions

In general terms, meeting the psychosocial needs of adolescents involves addressing four closely related areas of need:

- mental health: helping adolescents to deal with conflict-related trauma
- psychological development: helping adolescents to construct a healthy sense of self
- social growth: helping adolescents to gain a healthy sense of society and their role in it
- skills-learning: providing adolescents with basic education, task-specific coping mechanisms, life skills, and employability

At present, not enough is being done to address *any* of these needs in conflict, pre-conflict, and post-conflict zones. In part, this failure is due to a lack of funding and political will. However, it is also due to gaps in *knowledge*.

Gaps in knowledge

- In general, donors, NGOs, UN agencies, and local authorities in conflict zones have not yet seriously recognized or acknowledged the needs, capacities, and social significance of adolescents. This **failure to 'mainstream' adolescents** at all levels has resulted in a lack of appropriate programming across all of the categories identified above. The Action for the Rights of the Child (ARC) project is a notable exception to this rule, and its swift and complete implementation must be ensured.

- In order to appropriately understand and provide for the needs of adolescents, care providers must **view adolescents as a special category** when assessing needs and developing programming guidelines. For instance, UNHCR's registration system must collect data in a way which allows adolescents to be identified as a group.[12] Improved data collection is needed concerning the health needs of adolescent war victims.

[12] Non-governmental Organization (NGO) Submission to the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 29 February – 2 March 2000.

- More attention must be paid to **understanding local variations** in how adolescents are viewed by society, and how they view themselves. As one report has noted, some societies view children as more or less passive victims, while in others (e.g. Mozambique) children are viewed as strong, full-fledged social participants.[13] In addition, programmes must be tailored to the customs, tastes, and social conventions of the society. Failing to take note of the cultural context can result in programmes which are not taken seriously, and which fail as a result.

- There is an insufficiently deep understanding of **what types of therapeutic interventions are best suited to addressing the psychosocial needs of adolescents** in conflict and post-conflict zones. Individual, group-based, and community-based approaches all have positive and negative attributes, which must be carefully weighed within the relevant cultural context. For example, it has been suggested that the individual, trauma-based response which is associated with Western psychiatry is very costly, requires highly trained staff, carries the potential to re-traumatize victims, and may be unfamiliar and therefore ineffective in non-Western settings.[14]

Moving forward: Strategies for meeting the needs of adolescents

In addition to working to broaden understanding of the ideas presented above, child advocates should concentrate on several other means of assisting adolescents.

- Adolescents should be **actively involved** in the planning and implementation of programmes. Properly administered, this approach is most likely to foster effective programming, and to yield incidental benefits in terms of empowering adolescents.

- Adolescents, more than young children, are likely to benefit from engaging in **dialogue** on a variety of issues with elders and support personnel. Individual and group-based dialogical approaches can be applied to all of the basic needs described above: addressing psychological trauma, building a healthy sense of self, providing adolescents with a sense of their place within society, and exploring ways of building a more peaceful and productive future.

- It is vitally important to provide adolescents with **realistic, positive alternatives to participation in armed conflict**. We mention this point only in passing, because it is dealt with in detail in the section on 'child soldiers.'

- When designing programming, it is also important to take note of **economic realities**. In an ideal world, adolescents would have the time to attend secondary school, engage in therapy, take part in group-based social reconstruction activities, and learn marketable skills. In reality, many adolescents – particularly heads of households – are struggling to

[13] WCRWC, Untapped Potential, at fn. 93.
[14] ibid.

make money in order to support their families. To the extent that it is possible to reconcile these goals, programming should consciously aim to do so.

- It is equally important to provide adolescents with **education** ranging from basic literacy training, to secondary school and vocational training, to opportunities for tertiary education. Most emergency education initiatives have failed to address the needs of late learners, or to develop secondary school curricula.

d) Girls

Gender roles and relations shape the experiences of both girls and boys, leading to different experiences in armed conflict and post-conflict situations. Expectations about 'appropriate behavior' or roles for girls and boys vary according to the age of the child, and change across time and place. While in certain cultures it may be acceptable for small girl children to attend schools, as they mature they may be expected to withdraw to assume domestic responsibilities and/or prepare for marriage. In other cultures, boy children may be permitted to attend school since they are seen as more 'valuable' members of a family and more likely to contribute to family income.

Gender roles and relations lead to gender-specific forms of vulnerabilities for both girls and boys. Boy children are more likely to be pressured to act as child soldiers, whereas girl children are more likely to be forced to act as prostitutes or to provide sex and domestic labour to military groups.[15]

Assumptions based on gender expectations may lead assistance workers unintentionally to design programmes which discriminate against either girls or boys. For example, in one youth-directed assistance programme in Mozambique, a field worker noted that ninety percent of recipients were boys.[16] After making inquiries, she learned that girls had to stay at home to look after younger members of their family. When she asked NGOs distributing aid "what happens to the girls?", no one knew. It had not occurred to NGO workers that if girls were not present, they were not benefiting from the assistance programmes and were therefore potentially more vulnerable. Later, the same field observer noted that the majority of children living in the street were boys. Once again, no one knew where girls were or how they were surviving.

Girl children often encounter discrimination on the basis of their gender.[17] This is manifest in varied social, political and economic ways throughout all stages of a child's life: preference for sons resulting in female infanticide and prenatal sex selection; higher payment of midwives for the birth of a boy over a girl; discrimination against girls in food allocation, domestic and paid labour, education and health services; early marriage; and sexual violence and abuse, to name a few forms. Girls are much less often encouraged to participate in public sphere

---

[15] The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. "The Use of Children as Soldiers in Africa: A country analysis of child recruitment and participation in armed conflict" Found on Reliefweb, January 2000. http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/chilsold.htm

[16] Carolyn Nordstrom, "Girls and War Zones," in D. Indra (ed). Engendering Forced Migration. New York: Bergahn Books. 1999, pp.63-82.

[17] This fact was recognized by states in Section L. of the Beijing Platform for Action, 1995.

activities, often with the result that they have fewer opportunities than boys to participate in decision-making affecting their lives.

Gaps in Knowledge

Two **critical gaps in knowledge exist surrounding the experiences of girls in conflict and post-conflict situations**. **First**, little is known about the general and gender-specific experiences girls encounter during conflict situations. **Second**, international humanitarian agencies lack an awareness of how gender roles and relations affect these experiences, as well as the ability of girl children to benefit from assistance and protection activities extended to them.[18]

One of the first steps in overcoming this gap is to **begin to look for girl children and young women**. Are they actively involved in assistance programmes to meet the needs/promote the rights of children and youths? If they are so involved, how are they involved and in what capacity? If not, where are they, and what are they doing? To answer these basic questions and to develop knowledge of how gender affects or shapes the capabilities and needs of girls, a gender analysis is critical.

Questions to develop gender analysis might include:

- **What roles and responsibilities are girls expected to carry out?** Where are the girls and what are they doing? Is what they do valued in the community? What is their relationship to family members and the community at large?

- **How might girls be exploited for gender-related roles/resources?** Does their gender make them particularly vulnerable to specific forms of abuse? For example, it has been documented that girls are often trafficked for reasons of forced sexual labour. Girls are also trafficked for purposes of forced domestic labour in homes and insurgent or military camps.

- **How do gender roles and relations affect the ability of girls to access assistance programmes?** Does childcare of younger siblings or responsibility for domestic work affect the ability of girls to go to school or receive assistance? Do assumptions based on 'male norms' limit the ability of girls to access assistance? For example, in a demobilization, de-militarization and rehabilitation (DDR) programme, ex-child soldiers were issued assistance packages only after they handed in their weapons. Because girls were not usually issued a weapon, they were unable to access DDR programmes.[19]

- **How do gender roles and relations affect the ability of girl children to participate in programmes or decision-making?** Does lower value placed on girls, or a lower sense of self-esteem, restrict girls or young women from participating in programmes? For example, in a youth group in Mostar, girls found it difficult to assert themselves in

[18] Telephone interview with Beth Woronuik, Gender and Peacebuilding Working Group, CCPP, June 16, 2000.
[19] *Ibid.*

mixed-sex groups. To provide girls with a safe space to build self-esteem, a young women's network was formed. Today this network constitutes an important component of peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina, bringing together girls of different ethnic groups and building leadership skills.[20]

e) Boys

Adolescent boys are among the highest casualties of conflict, targeted because they represent the 'next generation of soldiers.' They are also targeted for military recruitment to fight in wars, or assume the role of 'protecting' their families when fathers are absent. Boys as young as 8 continue to be recruited into both government and non-governmental military forces despite the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the global campaign to raise the legal age of recruitment to 18.[21] While humanitarian programmes have begun to develop rehabilitation programmes – particularly for ex-combatants – progress is inhibited by a lack of funding and knowledge of the gender-related needs and resources of boys. Moreover, **preventative measures are still required, and standard programming must begin to more systematically address the needs and resources of boys, taking into consideration gender related roles and responsibilities**. As with girls, a gender related analysis is useful in this task, and can lead to better informed solutions or preventative measures.

Some gender-related questions relating to boys include:

- **What roles and responsibilities are boys expected to carry out?** The perception that 'men' are protectors often pressures young men and boys into combat roles. The inability to carry out traditional gender roles may led to psychological stress and aggressive behaviour or depression. In a study of Burundian refugees in Tanzanian camps, Simon Turner found that young men had high levels of anger as they perceived "to have lost [their masculine identities] in camps."[22] This anger often led to increased incidents of violence, or young men joining military forces. Vital questions include: what are the boys doing? How did conflict or displacement disrupt traditional gender roles, and with what consequence? How does society and the family view boys, and with what expectations of gender roles?

- **How might boys be exploited for these gender related roles/resources?** Does their gender make them particularly vulnerable to specific forms of abuse? For example, cultural or religious taboos regarding homosexual sex often render sexual violence committed against young boys invisible. Boys are often very reluctant to report such violations, and organizations often overlook this possibility on the assumption that it

---

[20] See UNHCR, the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women and Gender Equality,. "The Young Women's Experimental Learning Network", Erin Baines, ed. Building Partnerships Through Equality, Geneva: 2000.

[21] Graça Machel, Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. p.34.

[22] Simon Turner, "Angry Young Men in Camps." Centre for Documentation and Research, UNHCR, Working Paper #9, June 1999.

does not occur. In another example, boys are usually the targets of often highly gendered military propaganda and recruitment seeking to reinforce unequal gender relations in communities (male as warrior, female as reproducer of the nation) and play on the idea of male dominance (for example, soldiers have guns and are powerful people).

- **How do gender roles and relations affect the ability of boys to access assistance programmes?** For instance, young Sudanese men without a family received food assistance from an international agency. But because they had never been taught how to prepare food (this was always their mother's role from whom they had been separated), these young men became from sick from ill-prepared food.

- **How do gender roles and relations affect the ability of boys to participate in programmes or decision-making?** For example, the age of boys determines their status within some cultures, even patriarchal ones. Thus a young boy may be expected to take a secondary role to elders in receipt of assistance and protection and may be denied input into important community decisions. International organizations too often overlook this group, and programming which does not involve boys can lead to greater crises in the future. **Gender relations between girls and boys – particularly what value is placed on girls' or boys' 'voices' – must always be considered in seeking to understand how and why children are excluded from participation.**

f) Child soldiers

It is estimated that 300 000 children below the age of 18 are currently participating in armed conflict[23] despite the CRC (1989), article 38, which states that children below the age of 15 should not be recruited into armed forces. This article applies to both government and armed opposition groups. The following section examines responses to the crisis of child soldiers, examining advocacy as a tool of setting standards, and practical 'on the ground' attempts to prevent recruitment or rehabilitate demobilized children.

Global advocacy has raised awareness of the plight of child soldiers and support personnel, to raise acceptable standards and to pressure states to comply with the CRC. Olara Otunnu, Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, has made field visits to Kosovo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and the Sudan, in order to assess the situation of children, obtain commitments for child protection, and heighten awareness of the problems facing children in armed conflict. In this way, Otunnu's office plays a central advocacy role in pressing for state compliance with the CRC.

After a UN working group failed to reach agreement on a text relating to the minimum age for recruitment and participation in armed conflict, an international coalition of INGOs formed around a "straight eighteen" ban on child soldiers. This campaign has been joined by national-led coalitions in Belgium, Canada, Germany, Iran, Mozambique, the Netherlands,

---

[23] Amnesty International, Child Soldiers: One of the Worst Abuses of Child Labour. IOR 42/01/99. January 1999. Found on AI website: http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1999/IOR/I4200199.htm

Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Raising the minimum age for recruitment and participation to 18 would reinforce efforts to implement existing standards, where it is much more difficult for children under 15 to pass as 18 year-olds. At a regional level, the African Conference on the Use of Children as Soldiers adopted the Maputo Declaration in 1999, setting the minimum age to 18. In January 2000, the Optional Protocol of the CRC was debated once again, finally resulting in agreement to raise the minimum age of participation in combat to 18.[24] Despite this step forward, the agreement reached still "leaves too much open to interpretation" and is considered a watered down version of what child advocates aspired for.

In another positive step forward, a recent United Nations Security Council resolution (March 2000) recommends governmental prosecution of those who recruit child soldiers; special protection against rape and other abuses; incorporation of childrens' welfare into peace negotiations, and the training of peacekeeping forces in child protection.

In situations where children are pressured, coerced, tempted or forced to act as child soldiers, captive sexual or domestic workers and support personnel (carrying supplies, messages, conducting raids, acting as spies and so on) global and local strategies fall into one of two areas: *prevention* of recruitment and facilitating *re-integration and rehabilitation* for demobilized children. A community-based approach is often advocated, and prevention is linked to economic security, education and family well-being. However, as the following text box suggests, **prevention and reintegration activities must be locally rooted, with an in-depth understanding of the social, political and economic circumstances surrounding the issue, as well as an awareness that a lack of international will allows this tragedy to continue.**

'It is important to recognize that the factors which give rise to the participation of children in conflict are complex. No single model can either explain all the factors, nor outline a uniform procedure which will prevent child recruitment, nor ultimately enable procedures for demobilization and social reintegration. This is dependent upon an assessment of the political, social and economic factors which are influencing the process of the conflict, an understanding of the local context, and the resources available to protect children and secure their well-being. The main obstacle to the prevention of recruitment and abduction, however, is the unwillingness among community- and military leaders to abolish this atrocious practice.'

-- *Protection on Children and Adolescents in Complex Emergencies* Oslo/Hadeland November 1998, Conference Report

Gaps in Knowledge and Strategies

- **Gender analysis can help clarify the different experiences of boys and girls as child soldiers, support personnel and children held for domestic or sexual purposes and therefore improve solutions.** Currently, conflicting information exists, including the exact number of girl soldiers in the 30 conflicts continuing throughout the world today: some reports suggest that girl soldiers constitute only one percent of

[24] The Optional Protocol still needs to be adopted by the UN Commission on Human Rights (spring 2000) and the General Assembly (fall 2000) before it will be open for signature and ratification.

this group, others claim this figure is up to 30 percent.[25] Gender sensitive knowledge is essential to design appropriate strategies and programmes.

- **International standards and norms remain woefully weak.** The Optional Protocol is still 'optional' and so states are under no obligation to sign and ratify it. An imperative strategy therefore, is to maintain international pressure to encourage ratification.

- **Implementation of existing international norms and agreements requires an effective accountability mechanism** whereby states or non-state military groups are compelled to file reports to a monitoring body at regular intervals. Existing monitoring requires more vigilant follow-through and an effective mechanism for response to violations. For example, one criticism of the SRSG on Children's office is that field visits provide an opportunity for governments to join the 'moral minority' by making commitments to the Secretary General.[26] Without strict follow-up, these most often remain empty promises.

g) Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Children and Adolescents

Children and adolescents constitute up to 50 percent of all refugee populations.[27] As such, they are a critical group in need of assistance and protection. And yet historically, most agencies have distributed aid through adult males, assuming that assistance and protection 'trickle down' through families. This practice sometimes leads to poor redistribution practices, failing to meet the basic human needs of women and children. Children face a range of vulnerabilities in displacement, such as increased exposure to physical health risks and violence as well as disruption of vital patterns in social life such as education, and separation from families and peers groups.

Different assistance and protection needs arise in different situations of displacement:

- **Refuge:** Separation and basic needs are often the focus of assistance and protection strategies when populations cross national borders to seek asylum in another country. International agencies continue to find strategies to respond to these needs and support the resources of refugee children, as well as raise awareness among humanitarian staff. To meet this mandate, a child rights perspective must be mainstreamed throughout programming and protection activities, so that all initiatives take into consideration the diversity of children and adolescents at all stages.

---

[25] The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. "Girls with Guns….An Agenda On Child Soldiers for 'Beijing Plus Five." Found on the Coalition's website: http://www.child-soldiers.org/reports/special%20reports.html

[26] Telephone interview with Kathy Vandergrift, Chair of the CCPP Child in Armed Conflict Working Group, CCPP, June 28, 2000.

[27] UNHCR. Refugee Children and Adolescents. *1999 Global Appeal*. Found on UNHCR website: http://www.unhcr.ch/fdrs/ga99/children.htm

- **Return:** Return is often a process riddled with uncertainties, and agencies must take all efforts to guarantee the protection of persons returning, paying particular attention to girls and boys. In return situations, agencies and governments must balance the demand to meet basic needs while at the same time developing longer term programmes to promote the reintegration of children and adolescents through schooling, vocational training and livelihood projects.

- **Asylum and Detention:** Children and adolescents are often assumed under adult asylum applications, and this may be problematic if the child has a legitimate claim of asylum, but the adult does not. NGOs continue to lobby governments to uphold the right of the child to claim asylum and to avoid scenarios where children are detained within countries of asylum.

- **IDPs:** Children and adolescents displaced inside zones of conflict are often the most difficult to provide assistance or protection to. IDP groups are very often scattered throughout a country, in areas that are difficult to reach due to physical terrain and/or armed conflict.

UNHCR uses the CRC as a framework for action with refugee, returnee and internally displaced children, highlighting three priorities: promoting the best interests of the child, non-discrimination and participation. **In emergency and post-emergency phases of displacement, specific problems to be addressed are: child separation, protection of children from exploitation, and critical survival needs.** Responses include the creation of emergency education, safe spaces for children, tracing and family reunification, monitoring and follow-up, as well as specific initiatives to provide longer term possibilities for adolescents with respect to education and livelihood.

A key tenet of dealing with child refugees and IDPs is that they should remain with their families whenever possible. In the Kosovo refugee crisis, families were sometimes forcibly separated during refugee transfers to third states. This situation can be exacerbated by the failure to respond quickly to provide registration and tracing services. As the largest international organization for the displaced, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) must be prepared to undertake these tasks in a timely manner, given that state governments in war zones are often ill-equipped and unwilling to do so.[28]

A key area of intervention is awareness raising among UNHCR staff and that of implementing organizations and other humanitarian agencies. To this end, UNHCR and the International Save the Children Alliance have developed a critical training tool – the Action for the Rights of Children (ARC). The development of training modules has been underway for several years now and the next step is ensuring mass distribution and implementation of the basic principles in ARC. Yet such a task is extremely costly, involving the translation of materials and the development of innovative ways of reaching a mass public (such as the internet). Continued and **generous funding is essential to realize this objective.**

---

[28] For an example of the impact of UNHCR's inattention to forced separation of families on children, see Barry Burciul, Responding to Humanitarian Emergencies: The Lessons of Kosovo.

Gaps between Policy and Practice

Despite increased awareness in the refugee assistance community, the gap between policy and practice looms large. At the heart of the problem lies the lack of commitment to upholding children's rights. Institutional and individual resistance to children's rights are two reasons that change remains slow. Staff, including senior staff, are either unaware of reluctant to incorporate a child rights perspective into UNHCR programming.[29] In this respect, former Regional Advisor for Refugee Children in East Africa, Maricela Daniel, stated that "Canadian advocacy is very important. We saw at the last Standing Committee [to the Executive Committee] the interest of donors. This had a clear impact on [senior UNHCR officials]."[30] To this end, **governments should continue the efforts of dedicated staff to deliver ARC training and build the knowledge and capacity of field workers**.

h) Children with disabilities

In general, children with disabilities are among the most marginalized in conflict and post-conflict situations and too often do not receive the support and assistance they need. Encountering discrimination and faced by ignorance regarding their particular needs and capabilities, disabled children have been the first to be excluded from schooling, health care, and general assistance projects. Together, these barriers leave disabled children economically and socially marginalized in ways that are harmful to them and to society as a whole.

There are some exceptions. Ironically, Sierra Leone – where many children suffered deliberate amputations as well as 'normal' war injuries – provides a good opportunity for the aid community to implement large scale programmes to educate and employ disabled children and young adults. Attention should be given to learning lessons from this case, and replicating successful programmes in other locales.

Of course, the best way to approach this issue is through prevention. A fundamental question then becomes, how do children become disabled in conflict or during post-conflict situations? **According to the World Health Organization, most disabilities are caused by malnutrition, communicable diseases and low quality pre-natal care, as well as accidents and domestic violence.** [31]

Gaps and Strategies

- **Much more needs to be done not only in terms of preventative health care programmes sensitive to children, but also to actively protect children in violent settings, stop the flow of arms to conflict zones, and remove mines and other ordnance from these areas.** Canada has taken a lead role in the fight against land mines, and this fight must be continued through education and fund-raising activities.

[29] E-mail exchange with Neil Boothby, former Senior Coordinator for Refugee Children, UNHCR. 16 June 2000.
[30] E-mail exchange with Daniel, 6 June 2000. Boothby also affirmed this point and stated that "it is very important that Canada continue with its leadership", e-mail exchange 16 June 2000.
[31] Cited in *Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care*. Geneva: UNHCR, 1994. p. 71.

- **In practical terms, children can benefit from and even take a lead in, areas such as mine awareness and public health campaigns.**

- **In terms of rehabilitation, community based programmes should seek to reach out, and include and integrate children and young adults with disabilities throughout their programmes.** Humanitarian assistance can provide support to local organizations composed of disabled persons to promote their participation in the reconstruction of the country.

4. The way ahead: policy prescriptions

The preceding sections have considered issues of children and violent conflict through the lens of diversity. Along the way, we have suggested numerous ways of improving our understanding of these issues, and of making specific types of programming more efficient, effective, and responsive to a broader range of needs. The present section will offer policy prescriptions which are at once more pointedly specific, and more general in the sense that they refer to a variety of 'levels'. These prescriptions are not exhaustive: they are primarily intended to provoke and guide discussion of Canada's role in addressing issues of children in conflict. Nonetheless, they do point to areas which require special attention, and to matters in which Canada might best use its resources to effect positive change.

a) General policy principles

- Policies should be child-centric: i.e., informed primarily by the needs and capacities of children. Toward this end, they must also take into account how children might benefit from programmes aimed at addressing the needs of adults and of society as a whole.

- In all activities, from assessment to programme planning, implementation and review, policies should be sensitive to the diversity of children and their needs, as outlined above.

- Policies should emphasize sustainable programming and long-term development, rather than short-term, arbitrary, unpredictable emergency assistance schemes. IOs, NGOs, and donors should work in concert to find ways to bridge the relief-development gap.

- Policies should promote the participation of NGOs, and should take advantage of NGO expertise. At the same time, NGOs should not be viewed as a means by which the state can 'hand off' its responsibility to care for the children of the world.

- Maximum attention should be paid to employing, and supporting existing local social structures. Such an approach is likely to lead to more effective, efficient, and durable programmes which benefit society at large.

- Good practices should be compiled and widely disseminated among NGOs and relevant bodies to provide examples of what can be done. "Lessons learned" exercises, and the preservation of institutional memory, should be heavily promoted.

- There is considerable rhetorical support for the idea that children should be involved in consultative and decision-making processes in and among states, IOs, and NGOs. We need to move beyond the rhetoric and tokenism, and develop realistic, productive, and substantive ways of putting this idea into practice. Serious study should be devoted to determining precisely how children can best be included in these processes.

b) Before conflict

i) Demilitarization

- Canada should explore ways of stemming the flow of light weapons into conflict-prone regions. Usually, arms embargoes are put into place only when the area is already awash in weapons. In any event, physical embargoes (i.e., interdiction at the borders of conflict areas) are usually ineffective. Tactics such as public shaming, lawsuits, and punitive fines against companies which produce such weapons should be explored.

- There are many things that can be done to prevent the militarization of children and to reduce child recruitment. The cornerstone of such efforts must be development: for as long as children are left without attractive alternatives, the fight against child recruitment will be a losing battle. Canada should promote *early* investment in conflict-prone areas, aimed at educating children, providing them with vocational skills, and furnishing them with gainful employment. Such efforts cannot be divorced from the imperative of supporting families, so that childrens' employment does not impede their education.

- Further attention should be given to peace education, focusing on communal dialogue. Children, adolescents and adults should engage with each other about the substantive meaning of themes such as childhood, adolescence, adulthood, responsibility, honour, society, war, peace, and progress.

- Canada should continue to press for broad ratification of the Optional Protocol to the CRC, and for the adoption of stronger regulations concerning the use of child soldiers. The International Criminal Court should be given a special mandate to try cases involving violations of childrens' rights during conflict. The expectation of impunity for such crimes must be obliterated entirely.

ii) Development and Local Empowerment

- One of the best ways of preventing conflict, and of lessening its impact on children, is to promote development. However, development should not be viewed as a solely economic

phenomenon. Rather, it should be seen as a process whereby societies, social groups, and individuals develop useful capacities and strengths. In conflict-prone areas, this process should emphasize flexible, decentralized structures which might allow societies to maintain health, welfare, education, and other services even during times of conflict.

- Canada should support campaigns which seek to educate citizens in conflict-prone regions about the rights of children. Such campaigns should also aim to raise awareness about particular threats facing at-risk groups of children, and should point to concrete means of addressing those threats. Children have proven effective in spreading the 'mines awareness' message, and where possible, such child-to-child tactics should be replicated.

- Taking into consideration local cultural norms and networks, adolescents and girl children in particular should be empowered to learn, teach, work, counsel, and express themselves.

- Canada should explore means of fostering adolescent-driven enterprises and progressive social groups, and should provide micro-credit loans and grants to such entities where appropriate.

iii) Raising Awareness and Building Capacity

- The protection of child rights is not solely the responsibility of 'experts' or 'specialists', nor should this task be marginalized and defined primarily by 'special programmes.' Within any organization, agency or department, all staff must be aware of childrens' rights issues and able to analyze every initiative to assess what impact it may have on children. Toward this end, organizations and departments should engage in mainstreaming strategies to build the capacity of their staff. This applies to UN agencies and departments, NGOs, state governments, and donor organizations.

- Military personnel and police are well situated to act as child advocates. Training of this group should move forward without delay. Toward this end, current training exercises for peacekeepers represent an important step forward.

- NGOs and humanitarian workers would similarly benefit from training on protecting and promoting childrens' rights. It may be possible to tap into ARC as an existing resource.

- Gender and situational analyses which specifically address children/adolescents in conflict and post-conflict situations need development, and need to be incorporated into existing methodological approaches.

iv) Coordination and Institutional Change

- CIDA and DFAIT must work through a natural stage of resolving differences in their operational approaches and mandates to coordinate on child rights issues.

- Canada should initiate a wide-ranging, candid dialogue regarding the 'new humanitarian architecture' – i.e., discussions regarding the direction of relationships between donor states, UN agencies, and NGOs. This exercise should seek to clarify and reconcile issues regarding NGO autonomy and accountability, the coordination capacity of UN agencies, and the desire of donors to manage programming. The aims of the exercise should be to foster efficient and effective programming, to promote routine dialogue regarding quality-control issues, and to ensure a high degree of basic coordination between humanitarian actors in order to eliminate gaps and overlaps in services.

- Canada should promote regular Inter-Agency Standing Committee meetings on childrens' issues. These would involve relevant humanitarian actors including UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO, the office of the SRSG on Children, large NGOs and NGO umbrella organizations, and ICRC. The IASC should seek to ensure a clear division of responsibility with regard to various childrens' rights issues in a given crisis, and to ensure that childrens' rights and needs are constantly being considered.

- Canada should sponsor periodic independent studies to ensure that inter-agency squabbling and power-plays are not hampering the effective mainstreaming of childrens' issues in the UN agencies and departments. Such studies should pay close attention to the accountability and preparedness of relevant agencies.

- Canada should press for regular, meaningful, and consequential reviews of the performance – singly and in concert – of donors, NGOs, and UN agencies. Underperformance, the failure to substantively mainstream children's rights, and the failure to engage in basic operational coordination, should result in pressure from high-level Canadian officials. At the same time, performance reviews should take into account indicators that capture longer term, qualitative goals – they should not rely solely on quantitative indicators and assessments based on short time frames.

- Canada should explore ways of streamlining, expediting, and de-centralizing decision making regarding funding for local NGOs promoting childrens' rights and needs. This process might be facilitated by providing local NGO administrators with management training in order to empower them to run administratively rational agencies, budget, and negotiate their way through complex funding procedures.

c) During conflict

i) Protecting and assisting children

- Canada should advocate pro-active strategies for protecting children during conflict. Such strategies should take a broad view of protection, based on the concept of 'human security.' Protection, in other words, must apply to groups and individuals, and must refer to physical, emotional, and economic security.

- Protection strategies should take into account the diversity of children and of the threats they face. For example, protecting groups of civilians from shelling inside a conflict zone will require a different strategy than protecting girls from rape inside refugee camps.

- All programming during the active phase of a conflict should take the imperative of protection seriously. For example, initiatives aimed at educating children should take account of the risks involved in gathering groups of children in a school building.

- Canada should promote and support the training and deployment of UN Child Protection Advisors and protection officers.

- The above-mentioned dialogue between humanitarian actors and governments should include discussions regarding the appropriate role of militaries in providing protection and engaging in assistance activities. The concerns of NGOs regarding the preservation of neutral humanitarian space should be taken seriously.

- Canada should take a lead role in promoting assistance activities during conflict, with a view to respecting *all* of the rights and needs of children. This means going beyond what are typically viewed as 'basic needs', and ensuring that children affected by conflict have a chance to learn, work, and participate in decisions and initiatives which will affect their future.

ii) Responding to violations of children's rights

- Much more attention should be paid to recognizing, reporting, and redressing violations of childrens' rights. All humanitarian workers and other personnel with proximity to children should be taught about childrens' rights and how to respond to violations of those rights. Such violations should be reported, publicized, and addressed through all possible means.

- During conflict, states should devote more resources to monitoring belligerents' (non)compliance with the CRC, to facilitation of evidence-gathering in the case of non-compliance, and to the swift prosecution of offenders. On an *ad hoc* basis, Canada should facilitate agreements with and between belligerent governments and paramilitaries, regarding the (non)use of child soldiers, and other aspects of childrens' welfare during conflict, including humanitarian access, safe havens, etc.

d) Post-conflict

i) Return and Reintegration

- The return of the displaced to their homes and communities is a 'symbol' of good-will and promise of peace. Children and adolescents must be assured the utmost protection in the return process, with particular emphasis on keeping families together. Canada should monitor UNHCR in this regard and advocate for increased attention to this issue where needed.

- Reintegration into a community may be complicated by poor economic, social and political conditions. Where possible, adolescents should be involved in socio-economic projects intended for the returning community. Livelihood projects and social networks are important means of building the local capacity of youth. Particular attention should be paid to the gender-related roles of girls which may need additional support and attention. Canada could build upon this area of work under the current Peacebuilding Initiative.

- A child rights perspective and youth interests should be part of any peace agreement (such as in the Lome Agreement). A minister for youth (such as in Rwanda) can be an important means to draw attention to youth issues in decision-making bodies, as well as to evaluate and report child rights violations or concerns at a national or international level.

ii) Reconstruction

- Those returning to their homes often find that there is no longer a shelter to call home, no longer a school for children, no health care centre or other critical infrastructure. To promote return, many humanitarian agencies (such as UNHCR and the World Bank) have begun large scale reconstruction projects, often involving community leaders in the rebuilding of their communities through short term employment projects. To the degree that this is possible, such reconstruction efforts should include adolescents and women, in both the physical and legal senses of 'involvement':

  a) Women and youth are often considered 'unable' to engage in construction activities, despite a number of successful projects involving women heads of household. Involving women and youth would break the perception that these groups are merely vulnerable, and enable them to learn new skills and become a part of the reconstruction of their communities. Canada can play a monitoring and sponsoring role in this regard, and advocate when necessary.

  b) At the same time, the reconstruction of private homes is often done without reflecting on a gender or child rights analysis of legal title. In Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, many families broke apart during and after the war. Legal title was almost always in the name of the father. In some instances, men moved back into their reconstructed homes (sometimes with new families), leaving women and their children to languish in 'collective centres.'[32] Assistance and protection must

[32] See UNHCR. Daunting Prospects: Minority Women, Obstacles to Return and Reintegration. UNHCR-Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sarajevo 2000.

always work together to keep the best interests of the child in mind. A gender analysis often helps bring to light some of the challenges faced in this respect.

iii) Rehabilitation

- Rehabilitation should focus on the diversity of needs and capabilities of the children and adolescents involved. Specifically, rehabilitation should take heed of the following points:

  - ✓ Rehabilitation projects should meet the needs of children and youth disabled through the conflict, ensuring their integration into education and social, economic and political structures.

  - ✓ Psychosocial projects and outreach programmes should be gender and age sensitive.

  - ✓ Peace education has been documented as one of the more effective means of engaging youth. Particular attention should be paid to involving disabled children. Gender roles which limit the participation of girls should be identified and addressed to promote gender equality in programming.

  - ✓ The de-mobilization and rehabilitation of child soldiers is critical not only to promote the best interests of the child, but to promote peace and security in the community.

  - ✓ Livelihood projects targeting boys and girls may represent an essential transitional phase to building new skills for the future. Projects should be community based and enhance the local capacity of indigenous NGOs. All forms of income-generating projects should be linked to an empowerment approach which widens the range of opportunities and choices of beneficaries involved. Children and adolescents should be actively engaged in all stages of the project cycle: planning, design, implemention, and monitoring.

iv) Reconciliation

- Any programmes aimed at 'reconciliation' must reflect a local understanding of the term and incorporate cultural values and norms of the population involved. This is to avoid donor-driven reconciliation projects which often impose inappropriate solutions.

- Youth are often underestimated sources of positive change in post-conflict societies. Youth groups and networks which encourage the interaction of youth from different 'sides' of a conflict are often effective means of bridging the gulf made between communities during a conflict. The leadership of youth in this respect should be supported and promoted as part of a broader programme to build peace in an area.

- A number of difficult questions arise regarding justice vs. reconciliation: Should an amnesty for crimes against children be granted in the face of a fragile peace process or should impunity not be tolerated under any circumstances? Should there be a higher standard for crimes against children vs. crimes against the rest of humanity?

5. A framework for action

Readers who wish to explore the possibilities for productive change may wish to engage with the 'framework for action' presented below. We present this in the spirit of a playful, creative exercise intended to facilitate new understandings of how goals, means, and actors fit together, and to reveal new combinations that might be fruitfully exploited by child advocates regardless of who and where they are. It may be particularly useful to use these ideas in conjunction with the policy prescriptions presented above, with a view to exploring different ways of making those ideas into reality.

Basic needs: these umbrella categories capture (however broadly) the most vital needs of children. These are the basic objectives which child advocates seek to attain through the use of strategies, actors, and individual policy initiatives.

Strategies for change: these are the most basic types of tasks that can be employed in order for change to take place. Note that they are not mutually exclusive: many of them overlap and complement each other. Note also that these 'strategies for change' are not simply lobbying strategies to be used by child advocates – they encompass different types of activities which can be effected by all of the 'agents of change,' at all social levels – from the individual to the governmental and non-governmental.

Agents of change: the actors that are involved. These can be the victims of suffering, the perpetrators of violence, the beneficiaries of assistance, obstacles to change, direct partners in change, passive observers, or potential indirect 'tools' of change. Regardless, they all play a role – or can play a role – in how conflict affects children. Used together, people, organizations, ideas, strategies and resources can lead to change.

Basic Needs	Strategies for Change	Agents of Change
Health and physical security	Knowledge gathering	Individual children, adolescents, adults
Security in a social network	Awareness raising and education	State parties to conflicts
Economic welfare	Agenda-setting	Armed forces and police
Mental health	Advocacy	Rebel / paramilitary organizations
Psychological development	Coordination and planning	Local governments and authorities
Social growth	Capacity-building	Governments outside of conflict zones
Education	Fund raising	INGOs, NGOs and umbrella organizations
Skills-learning	Mobilization	Youth groups and student movements
Freedom and autonomy	Legal and normative change	Local, trans/national informal networks
Respect and dignity	Building political will	Families and community leaders
	Field activities	UN Security Council
	Operational improvements	UN General Assembly
	Local empowerment	UN Agencies, Departments and Offices
	Institutional change	International Criminal Tribunals
	Networking and communication	News and entertainment media
		Interested citizens / disinterested audiences
		Academics and consultants
		Corporations and investors